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ABSTRACT

This study compared the techniques used by college English teachers in their classrooms with the comments of subject experts concerning the value of these methods. In order to assess the frequency of teachers' use of specific techniques, a job analysis questionnaire consisting of 29 items was given to 15 faculty members and 15 doctoral students in English at two Indiana institutions of higher learning. A content analysis was then performed on sources gathered from a series of bibliographies on the teaching of college English, published by the National Council of Teachers of English, and from a computer search of relevant documents and journal articles indexed by the Educational Resources Information Center. A total of 387 recommendations were recorded and categorized according to four areas: planning instruction, executing instruction, evaluating instruction, and meeting students. The author concludes that the use of job analyses can form the basis for future teacher preparation; the use of content analyses of materials concerning educational theory can establish philosophical consensus. (KS)

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THE PROFESSION OF TEACHING ENGLISH AND THE TRAINING OF PERSONS FOR THAT PROFESSION

1976 MLA CONVENTION, SESSION 295: TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

A Research Basis for Determining the Content of a Course on Teaching College English

George L. Findlen

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Recently I have been doing research to answer two questions: (1) How do we find out what college teachers of English need to know and be able to do as teachers? and (2) What do college teachers of English need to know and be able to do as teachers? In this presentation, I will describe my research, summarize my findings, and then share some of my thoughts about the approach I have taken and why I think it contributes to the profession.

Stimulated by the century-long criticism of the Ph. D. as preparation for college teaching, noting that elements within and without our profession have been calling upon us to give "greater emphasis to the preparation of college teachers," and noting that, as a profession, we still do not agree "on the amount and kind of pedagogical training Ph. D. candidates should recieve," I designed a dissertation study to develop the content of a doctoral course on Teaching College English.

When developing a training program, there are, basically, two sources of information to draw from: (1) what people do when performing the task or job you wish to prepare others to do, and (2) what experts in the area call for. Since no single information source is adequate by itself, I drew upon both. Thus, to accomplish my task, I did a job analysis study to determine what college teachers of English, teaching predominantly lower division English, actually do as teachers, and I did a content

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analysis of the books and articles on teaching college English to determine what is most often recommended for inclusion in a course on Teaching College English.

Job analysis is a study to determine specifically what tasks are involved in performing a job, especially those that are hard to perform or learn, and the knowledge and skills needed to perform the job well. The purpose of my job analysis study was two-fold: (1) to construct a comprehensive list of the tasks performed by college teachers of English in their capacities as instructors, and (2) to determine which of these tasks the prospective college teacher of English can best learn to do with the assistance of preservice training.

In the area of Education, the structured interview is the preferred method, and it was the one selected for this study. Items for the interview were determined by introspection on my part. The list was tested for completeness by asking three graduate students with a total of thirty-two years of college teaching experience to list what they did as teachers. This test only uncovered one new item which was added to my list. The resulting twenty-nine items were grouped under four headings: planning instruction, executing instruction, evaluating instruction, and meeting students.

Each item had four questions the interviewer asked: How often do you do this task (Frequency)? How hard is this task (Difficulty)? How important is skill in this task for your teaching (Importance)? In your opinion, how desirable is it for college teachers of English to have preparation in this task as part of their graduate training (Training)? For each question, interviewees were to indicate one of three responses ranging from regularly, hard, essential to rarely, easy, unimportant.

Fifteen faculty members at two Indiana institutions (one, a state institution offer-

ing doctoral work in English; the other, a private, four-year institution) and fifteen doctoral students in English (at the first institution) were my subjects.

On completion of the interviews, the four numerical responses of all thirty interviewees to a given item were summed and divided by the total number of responses to the item. This provided an average score and permitted ranking of items in order from highest to lowest. The ranking was done to discriminate between most and least important since no one course can ever accomplish all. (Not even degree programs do that.) The top ten items are the following:

Lead Discussions

Grade Theme Assignments

Calculate Grades for Assignments, Tests, and Courses

Motivate Students

Prepare Assignments

Lecture

Make Students Welcome and Comfortable

Diagnose Learning Problems

Use a Variety of Approaches

Recommend Corrections for Learning Problems

Content analysis can be described as a method whereby a given body of writing is examined for the presence of words and ideas, determined in advance of the analysis, which are then counted. The purpose of my content analysis study was (1) to identify, using an objective and systematic method, what those who write about the preparation of college teachers of English believe they need to know and be able to do as teachers, (2) to classify those beliefs, and (3) to rank them in order of the frequency of their appearance.

Content analysis starts with a question, which for me, was that of my overall

study: what do college teachers of English need to know and be able to do as teachers? In my reading, I excluded statements regarding preparation in content and those dealing with professional development (committees, conferences). My focus was upon what is done for, in, and as a result of instructional contact with students. I likewise excluded comments having a philosophical orientation--i.e., what should the college teacher of English be (curious, loyal). In my reading, I accepted and recorded single assertions--usually simple sentences; each idea or word was recorded only once per article or chapter. Sentences with compound subjects and/or compound predicates were broken down into single assertions before counting. Words and ideas were classified using the four categories of items from the earlier job analysis interviews. Materials read were relevant titles in a series of annotated bibliographies on the college teaching of English published by the NCTE and a printout from the Educational Resources Information Center containing both document and journal items. Together these two sources cover a thirty-year period from the end of WW II to the present. A total of 387 assertions were recorded and sorted into 21 sub-groups under the four headings used in the job analysis and under a fifth heading as well - Background Knowledge of Higher Education. The ten sub-groups with the most assertions are the following:

Pedagogical Skills (Lecture, Discussion, Others)

Educational Psychology: Learning

Relating to Students

History of Higher Education

Philosophy of Higher Education

Tests and Measurements

Motivation

Knowing Students' Needs, Abilities

Materials and Texts

Reading and Marking Assignments, Tests

Now why did I take the approach I did and why do I believe that my study makes a contribution to the question of how should we prepare college teachers of English? Let us start by looking at how we answer the question presently.

We conceive of ourselves as knowers who discover or create knowledge to be imparted by lectures and publications. The function of Ph. D. training, which we all have and beyond which there is no formally recognized training, is to make us all into master knowers--to know as much as most or more than anyone else about figure x, work y, or topic z. As master knowers, then, we feel that we, individually, or in groups of two or three, constitute the best source of information as to what future college teachers of English ought to know and be able to do. This is an a priori approach; it is done by creative brainstorming and introspection. I call it the philosophical approach.

The difficulty is that no two of us fully agree with one another. And so if any ten of us state what ought to be in a course on Teaching College English, we have as much agreement as when the same ten of us are brought into a room to discuss the grade we gave to a freshman essay.

There is an alternative to perpetual disagreement. I find it in the literature on the preparation of professionals in Education, Medicine, Law, Ministry, Business, and Industry. There we see "how-to-do-what-they-do" as the theory and orientation of training. Microteaching, work with cadavers, moot court, homiletics, accounting, and the setting up of corporations for the development-manufacture-marketing of a product all stem from this notion: find out what people do and what they need to know to be able to do it, and then provide them with that knowledge and skill. The addition

of content analysis tempers "what-is" with "what-ought". This combination of methods is an a posteriori approach; it is done by an objective method systematically applied. I call this the empirical approach.

The benefits of the approach I took are two. First, the use of job analysis better correlates the preparation with what one is to be prepared for. This is the only justification of any course or program of preparation. And, second, the use of content analysis uncovers a consensus, enabling us to balance the wisdom of one or a few with the wisdom of many. To the extent that my use of these methods achieves these benefits, my research makes a contribution to our work.

Thank you.

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